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STRATEGIC REVIEW
18 NOVEMBER 1979

EDITORIAL

THE PATTERN IN CENTRAL AMERICA

While American attention has been riveted on the issue of Soviet combat forces in Cuba, a broader scenario is unfolding in America's hemispheric backyard—a scenario of which the Soviet presence in Cuba is a part, but perhaps not the most significant part.

On July 25, 1979, in a nationally televised evening press conference, President Carter was asked whether there was any danger that another Cuba might be developing in Nicaragua. The President answered that it was “a mistake for Americans to assume or to claim that every time an evolutionary change takes place, or even an abrupt change takes place in this hemisphere, that somehow it is a result of secret, massive Cuban intervention.” He concluded his comments on Nicaragua with the statement: “I do not attribute at all the change in Nicaragua to Cuba.”

There is evidence that this judgment does not conform with Central Intelligence Agency assessments. A May 2, 1979 CIA memorandum had been circulating on Capitol Hill more than ten days before Carter's press conference, and large portions had been published not only in U.S. periodicals but also in London's *Daily Telegraph*. According to the memorandum, Cuba had trained Nicaraguan guerrillas, had supplied arms to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), had used third country intermediaries (Panama and Costa Rica) to deliver assistance to the Sandinistas, had helped develop the military and political infrastructure to wage war and consolidate victory, had activated the Honduran Communist Party apparatus to help provide training sites for FSLN guerrillas in Honduras, and had funded the “Committee of Solidarity with the Sandinista Front” headed by FSLN member Ernesto Cardenal, a Nicaraguan priest.

Mexico as well as El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are all threatened by the change in Nicaragua. Cuba has named as its ambassador to Nicaragua Julian Lopez, who had been evicted from Mexico in the 1960s for supplying Cuban money to Mexican guerrillas. Charges are circulating as well that the Sandinistas are aiding armed insurrection in El Salvador and the rest of Central America. There is a videotape of a purported Sandinista who claims to have been trained in Cuba with Daniel Ortega Saavedra and who alleges that there is a Sandinista plan, code-named “Black December,” which calls for “armed effort in Central America, where it is expected that Honduras will be

Meanwhile the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs, Viron Vaky, has given a policy statement to Congress pointing out that the Castroites and Marxists were not the cause of tensions in Central America, but rather exploited existing tensions, and that the best means of preventing Communist penetration was to respect human rights, to promote stable governments and to further economic and social progress.

Under pressure from the United States, El Salvador's President granted an amnesty to imprisoned subversives. Some days after the amnesty, his brother was assassinated.

Certain glaring inconsistencies in the U.S. approach to human rights are pointed to in Central America. Thus in June 1979 the State Department released a 16-page report of alleged human rights violations in Nicaragua. At the same time, however, the May 1, 1979 manifesto of the Panamanian Agrarian Labor Party, charging human rights violations in Panama and the failure to re-establish democracy in that country as promised by Torrijos, was not taken up or published by the State Department. The question is thus raised: Does the United States direct the sledgehammer of human rights only at conservative governments?

In this context Latin Americans watched the U.S. policy toward Panama with great interest. Before the negotiations for the Canal Treaty were completed, it was clear that the United States would ignore Panamanian human rights groups' charges of human rights violations. According to one Panamanian human rights source published in September 1976, Panama's head of intelligence, Manuel Antonio Noriega, had openly traveled to Cuba for the training and orientation of his political security forces. According to the CIA memorandum of May 2, 1979, “In March [1979] a subordinate of Noriega's said that Panama is serving as a bridge to transport FSLN personnel to Cuba where they undergo training before returning to Nicaragua.”

Against this background many Latin Americans find it strange that the United States should now be concerned about Soviet combat troops in Cuba. It seems obvious that these troops help Cuba to persist in doing what it has always been doing: They free Cuban troops to continue their involvement in the Moroccan border dispute, help Cuban military training activities in Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, So-